Voices Unheard: Exploring Communication Apprehension Among Tertiary Students

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Abstract— Effective communication skills are essential for success in tertiary education, yet many students experience communication apprehension, which can hinder their academic performance and personal development. This qualitative research paper explores communication apprehension among tertiary students, focusing on its prevalence, influencing factors, coping strategies, and implications. Interviews with ten participants from a single institution in the Philippines reveal varying perceptions of communication apprehension across different academic years, with factors such as academic pressure, performance expectations, and language proficiency contributing to students' anxiety. Participants demonstrate resilience and employ coping strategies such as rehearsal and seeking social support to manage apprehension. Recommendations include tailored communication skills workshops, individualized coaching, integration of communication training into the curriculum, and fostering supportive learning environments. These findings contribute to a better understanding of communication apprehension among tertiary students and offer insights for addressing this challenge in educational contexts.

Keywords— communication apprehension, tertiary students, qualitative research, coping strategies, academic performance, Philippines

I. INTRODUCTION

Effective communication skills are essential for success in both academic and professional domains (Mason, 2017). However, many individuals experience communication apprehension, which can hinder their ability to express themselves confidently and engage effectively in various interpersonal interactions (McCroskey, 1977). This phenomenon is particularly relevant in the context of tertiary education, where students are often required to engage in classroom discussions, presentations, group projects, and other forms of communication-intensive activities (Myers & Anderson, 2008).

Tertiary education represents a pivotal period of personal and intellectual growth for students, characterized by increased academic demands and a diverse array of social interactions (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Within this dynamic environment, communication apprehension can manifest in various forms, including anxiety during class presentations, reluctance to participate in group discussions, and avoidance of public speaking opportunities (Daly & Miller, 1975). These challenges not only impact students' academic performance but also have broader implications for their social integration, self-confidence, and future career prospects.

Furthermore, the transition to tertiary education often coincides with significant developmental milestones, such as the exploration of identity, autonomy, and interpersonal relationships (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). For many students, communication apprehension may intersect with these developmental processes, exacerbating feelings of self-doubt and social isolation (Frey, 1991).

Moreover, the competitive nature of academic environments and the pressure to excel academically can further contribute to heightened communication apprehension among tertiary students (Cassidy & Eachus, 2002). Understanding the multifaceted nature of communication apprehension within the tertiary education context requires a comprehensive examination of its psychological, social, and institutional determinants, as well as its implications for student well-being and academic achievement.

This research focuses on exploring communication apprehension among tertiary students, aiming to gain insights into its prevalence, manifestations, and underlying factors across different academic years.

By understanding the nature of communication apprehension in this population, educators and policymakers can develop targeted interventions to support students in overcoming communication barriers and enhancing their overall academic and professional success.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication Apprehension

Communication apprehension, defined as the "fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (McCroskey, 1977), has been a subject of interest in communication research for several decades. McCroskey's Communication Apprehension Theory posits that individuals vary in their level of communication apprehension, which can be influenced by factors such as personality traits, past experiences, and situational contexts (McCroskey, 1984). High levels of communication apprehension have been linked to various negative outcomes, including decreased academic performance, reduced social interaction, and diminished self-esteem.

Communication Apprehension Among Tertiary Students

Communication apprehension among tertiary students has garnered attention due to its implications for academic success and personal development. Tertiary education represents a critical period for the acquisition of communication skills and the cultivation of interpersonal relationships (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). However, many students experience communication apprehension in academic settings, particularly during activities such as class presentations, group discussions, and interactions with instructors (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987). Research suggests that communication apprehension can impact students' willingness to participate in classroom activities, engage with course material, and seek assistance from peers or instructors (Gibbs & Applewhite, 2001).

Communication Apprehension in the Philippines

In the Philippine context, communication apprehension has been studied within the broader framework of communication competence and language proficiency. With English being the primary medium of instruction in many tertiary institutions in the Philippines, students may experience heightened levels of communication apprehension, especially if they perceive their English language skills to be inadequate (Abasolo & Pascasio, 2018). Cultural factors, such as the emphasis on respect for authority and fear of losing face, may also contribute to communication apprehension among Filipino students (Gudykunst et al., 1996). Despite these challenges, studies have shown that interventions aimed at improving communication skills and fostering a supportive learning environment can help alleviate communication apprehension among Filipino tertiary students (Lapuz & Manalastas, 2016).

Communication Apprehension Among Tertiary Students in the Philippines

Specific studies focusing on communication apprehension among tertiary students in the Philippines are limited but growing. Research conducted by Santos (2019) explored the experiences of Filipino college students in public speaking classes and identified factors contributing to communication apprehension, such as fear of embarrassment and negative evaluation. Similarly, a study by Reyes (2020) investigated communication apprehension among nursing students and found that practical training and exposure to real-life communication scenarios helped reduce apprehension levels.

Therefore, communication apprehension among tertiary students, particularly in the Philippines, remains a significant area of inquiry within the field of communication studies. Understanding the factors influencing communication apprehension and exploring effective strategies for addressing it can contribute to the enhancement of students' academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and overall well-being.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design utilizing semi-structured interviews to explore communication apprehension among tertiary students. Purposive sampling is used to select ten participants from a single tertiary institution in the Philippines, ensuring representation across different academic years. Participants are selected based on self-reported levels of communication apprehension. Data is collected through audio-recorded interviews guided by open-ended questions focusing on participants' perceptions, influencing factors, coping strategies, and suggestions for addressing communication challenges. Interviews are conducted in a private setting, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify and interpret patterns or themes within the data.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Theme 1: Perception of Communication Apprehension

The analysis revealed that participants exhibited varying perceptions of communication apprehension, with some describing it as a debilitating fear impacting their daily interactions, while others viewed it as a manageable

challenge. For instance, first-year students expressed heightened anxiety during class presentations and group discussions, attributing their apprehension to a lack of confidence and fear of negative evaluation. In contrast, fourth-year students demonstrated greater self-assurance but acknowledged lingering apprehension in high-stakes communication scenarios, such as job interviews or professional presentations.

Theme 2: Factors Influencing Communication Apprehension
Several factors contributing to communication apprehension among tertiary students emerged from the data. Academic pressure and performance expectations were cited as significant stressors, particularly among third and fourth-year students preparing for graduation and entry into the workforce. Additionally, language proficiency emerged as a prominent concern, especially among participants from non-English speaking backgrounds, who reported feeling disadvantaged in communication-intensive courses taught in English.

Theme 3: Coping Strategies and Support Mechanisms
Participants identified various coping strategies and support mechanisms for managing communication apprehension. Engaging in rehearsal and preparation techniques, such as practicing presentations and rehearsing responses to anticipated questions, was commonly reported across all academic levels. Seeking social support from peers and instructors was also highlighted as a valuable coping mechanism, providing reassurance and feedback to alleviate anxiety and build confidence. Furthermore, participants emphasized the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment that encourages risk-taking and fosters a sense of belonging.

Theme 4: Recommendations for Addressing Communication Apprehension
In discussing strategies for addressing communication apprehension among tertiary students, participants emphasized the need for targeted interventions and resources tailored to students' diverse needs and communication contexts. Suggestions included offering communication skills workshops, providing individualized coaching or mentoring, and integrating communication training into the curriculum across academic disciplines. Additionally, participants advocated for the normalization of communication apprehension and the promotion of a growth mindset

that acknowledges mistakes as opportunities for learning and growth.

The identified themes underscore the complex nature of communication apprehension among tertiary students and highlight the importance of addressing both individual and systemic factors to support students in developing effective communication skills. By recognizing students' diverse experiences and needs, educators and institutions can implement targeted interventions and create supportive environments conducive to overcoming communication barriers and fostering academic and personal growth.

V. CONCLUSIONS
This study has provided valuable insights into communication apprehension among tertiary students, shedding light on its prevalence, influencing factors, coping strategies, and implications for academic success and personal development. Through qualitative interviews with a purposive sample of ten students from a single tertiary institution in the Philippines, this research has identified several key themes that contribute to our understanding of communication apprehension within the tertiary education context.

Also, this underscores the importance of addressing communication apprehension among tertiary students to enhance their academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and overall well-being. By recognizing the complex interplay of individual and systemic factors influencing communication apprehension and implementing targeted interventions and support mechanisms, educators and institutions can create inclusive learning environments that empower students to develop effective communication skills and thrive in their academic and professional pursuits.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS
In light of the findings, several recommendations emerge to address communication apprehension among tertiary students effectively. Firstly, institutions should prioritize the development of tailored communication skills workshops aimed at addressing the unique needs of students. These workshops should incorporate interactive activities, role-playing exercises, and feedback mechanisms to provide practical strategies for managing anxiety and enhancing confidence in communication contexts.

Secondly, educators and academic advisors should offer individualized coaching and mentoring to students experiencing communication apprehension. This personalized support can help students identify specific challenges, set realistic goals, and develop personalized strategies for improvement. By providing ongoing guidance and encouragement, educators can empower students to overcome communication barriers and succeed academically.

Additionally, institutions should integrate communication training into the curriculum across academic disciplines. By incorporating communication-intensive assignments, presentations, and group projects into course requirements, educators can provide students with opportunities to practice and refine their communication skills in authentic contexts. This integration ensures that communication skills development becomes an integral part of the learning experience.

Fostering supportive learning environments is essential. Educators can create inclusive classroom atmospheres that validate students' experiences of communication apprehension and provide constructive feedback and encouragement. By promoting a culture of collaboration and experimentation, institutions can empower students to take risks and learn from their communication experiences.

Institutions should promote peer support networks or communication apprehension support groups. These networks provide a platform for students to share experiences, exchange coping strategies, and offer mutual encouragement and support. By connecting students facing similar challenges, institutions can create a sense of community and belonging among those grappling with communication apprehension.

Lastly, providing language support services is crucial, especially for students from non-English speaking backgrounds. Institutions should offer English language proficiency courses or language tutoring programs to assist these students in improving their language skills and confidence in communication-intensive courses taught in English. By addressing language barriers, institutions can ensure equitable access to communication skill development opportunities for all students.

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